

Woodcote High School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	101806
Local Authority	Croydon
Inspection number	307817
Inspection dates	30–31 January 2008
Reporting inspector	Anne Feltham HMI

This inspection of the school was carried out under section 5 of the Education Act 2005.

Type of school	Comprehensive
School category	Community
Age range of pupils	11–16
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number on roll	
School	1045
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Mr J Speller
Headteacher	Mr M Southworth
Date of previous school inspection	4 November 2002
School address	Meadow Rise Coulsdon CR5 2EH
Telephone number	020 8668 6464
Fax number	020 8660 9038

Age group	11-16
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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by one of Her Majesty's Inspectors, accompanied by three Additional Inspectors.

Description of the school

Woodcote High School is a large comprehensive school. It was redesignated as a specialist sports college in 2007 and has many awards, including SportsMark and International School status. It takes students from a variety of social and economic backgrounds, although the surrounding area is predominantly socially advantaged. The proportion of students eligible for free school meals is much lower than average and the proportion of students whose first language is not English is lower than average. Above average numbers of students come from a black or other minority ethnic background. The percentage of students with learning difficulties or disabilities is higher than in most schools.

Key for inspection grades

Grade 1	Outstanding
Grade 2	Good
Grade 3	Satisfactory
Grade 4	Inadequate

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 2

Woodcote High School is a good school, which has developed and improved in recent years. In particular, its curriculum has gone from strength to strength and now provides a good range of appropriate courses, enabling students to make subject decisions which suit their interests and aptitudes. The school's sports college status has enabled it to provide excellent opportunities to students, staff and the wider community. Although some parents feel that the school needs to make more effort to communicate with them regularly, parents and carers are generally confident that the school cares well for their children. One parent wrote, reflecting a common theme, 'Woodcote is a great school, full of loving and caring teachers. They push students hard so that they can become someone big in the future'.

Students start at the school with standards which are slightly above average, they work hard and make good progress as they move up the school. Vulnerable students and those in need of specific support do as well as their peers. Results are good and show improvement over time and the school sets challenging targets to try to improve these further. It has rightly identified that students could do better in English during Years 10 and 11 and that it needs to increase the challenge for higher-attaining students, to help them to reach the top grades.

The headteacher and his leadership team have a clear vision for the school's future development, and manage the day-to-day life of the school very effectively. They know their school well, and self-evaluation is honest and accurate. They understand how to highlight best practice, but also intervene swiftly where things need to be improved. Subject leaders monitor the work of their teaching teams, so they also know where the quality of teaching and learning needs to be improved. The school has introduced systems to track students' progress in recent years. These are enabling students to have a better understanding of how they are doing and what they need to do to improve. Parents and carers value extra information on their child's progress, and the school is developing ways of communicating more frequently. A few parents feel that behaviour needs further improvement, but inspectors found behaviour in class and around the school to be generally good. Students show respect for each other and older students look after younger ones.

As the school expands, it welcomes students from a greater range of backgrounds and communities. It is working hard to ensure that all students - including those who join after Year 7 - are integrated fully and achieve success. A former pupil who had entered the school in Year 10 as a refugee with little English, achieved exam success last summer and is now doing well in college. He returned recently to talk to Year 11 students, demonstrating the importance of aspiration and determination - and exemplifying the thriving school community, which enabled him to surmount barriers and succeed. This is a good school, which has the potential to do even better.

What the school should do to improve further

In order to make good even better, the school now needs to focus on:

- raising achievement for all students in English at Key Stage 4
- improving provision for higher-attaining students
- improving communication with parents.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 2

Students enter the school with levels of attainment that are slightly above average. They make good progress during Years 7 to 9 and, at the end of Year 9, achieve results which are above average in English, mathematics and science. By the end of Year 11, students attain GCSE results at grade A*-C which are above the national average, sustaining good progress. The number of students attaining the very highest grades is, however, too low. Progress in English in Years 10 and 11 has not been as rapid as in many other subjects, but strategies are now in place to remedy this situation. These are having a clear impact. Tracking procedures enable the school to intervene at an early stage when underachievement is identified, and good efforts are being made to fine-tune this system further. The introduction of vocational subjects for students aged 14 to 16 has raised motivation and current achievement in these subjects is strong. As a result of the school's specialism, all students work towards an accreditation in physical education or an associated subject and results are good. There are no significant variations in the achievement of different groups of students.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 2

The personal development and well-being of students are good. Students understand the need to eat and live healthily. Participation rates for the extremely wide range and variety of extra-curricular sporting activities are very high. Students, including the most vulnerable, say they feel safe at school and that the school deals effectively with any instances of bullying, racism or friendship issues. Should they feel the need, students always have an adult they can turn to in order to talk over personal concerns. Students generally enjoy their learning and appreciate their teachers' help. Attendance overall is on an improving trend and is now in line with national averages. A few parents raised concerns about behaviour. However, inspectors found behaviour in lessons and around the school to be good, including throughout a very wet and windy day. Fixed-term exclusions are also falling. A high number of students contribute to the community when they support local primary children in sporting activities. Students develop well their understanding of rights and responsibilities through the school's Pupil Parliament, active involvement in the house structure and in raising money for various charities. They become involved in international initiatives and broaden their understanding of citizenship beyond the local and national contexts. They develop good cultural understanding, for example by taking part in a range of performing arts activities. They develop key skills well to prepare for their future economic well-being and take part in enterprise events. The great majority of students continue to further education when they leave school.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 2

The quality of teaching and learning is good overall, and the school's own monitoring systems reflect this. Senior staff have a good understanding of strengths and weaknesses. They know where improvement is needed and are helping colleagues to improve their practice. As a result, in most lessons, students learn well and make good progress, reaching standards that are higher than average.

Most teachers plan carefully and fully. They know their students' needs well and many pitch their teaching at exactly the right level. They set students realistic challenges and pace lessons well. Learning is enhanced by the mutual respect shown by teachers and students in the classroom. Occasionally, a few teachers tend to talk too much or use questioning techniques less skilfully to determine what students know. In most subjects, teachers mark their students' work regularly but do not always return work sufficiently promptly to gain maximum momentum. Grading systems are not yet uniform and students can feel confused by this as they move from subject to subject. Teachers work hard to identify key learning points carefully, but they use a variety of terms to explain these to students and, again, this can cause confusion. However, the great majority of lessons are taught well and students respond accordingly with enthusiasm.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 2

The school offers a good and improving curriculum that meets the needs of most students well. The curriculum in Years 7, 8 and 9 is broad and balanced and suitably prepares the students for the next steps in their education. A number of recent changes have been made in Years 10 and 11. Two broad pathways are available. One pathway offers a more traditional choice of subjects; the other is more vocationally orientated with students offered a choice of four vocational options. Both routes enable the students to gain an appropriate range of qualifications and both offer suitable opportunities for students to progress to the next stage of education, or to the world of work. The vocational options are successfully offering the students a range of challenging courses to pursue. Reflecting the school's specialist sports college status, all students undertake at least two hours' physical education each week. Though improvements have been made, senior staff acknowledge that some further refinements to the curriculum are needed. These include reviewing the provision for languages and ensuring the needs of higher and lower attaining students are met. Enrichment and extra-curricular provision are outstanding and information and communication technology is used appropriately to deliver the curriculum.

Specialist sports college status is having an outstanding impact on the work of the school. Academic targets are met and the curriculum has been significantly enriched. Many students participate in an extensive range of activities, enabling students to adopt safer and healthier lifestyles, and to promote responsibility, enjoyment and community contribution. Both boys and girls immerse themselves in a plethora of activities, ranging from football competitions, to keep-fit classes and an expanding science club. Excellent leadership and management of specialist status have raised the school's profile. As well as extensive work with primary schools, provision made for the wider community is especially impressive. Over 100 adults a week use the school's sports facilities, often to gain qualifications or to improve identified medical conditions. In these ways, the school is directly benefiting the health and welfare of the local community.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 2

Good quality care, guidance and support ensure students are safe, promote their personal development and help them achieve well. Growing numbers of students whose first language is not English, and those with a range of learning difficulties or physical disabilities, are well supported and make progress in line with other students. Students looked after by the local authority are also well supported by the school. Provision for gifted and talented students is

embryonic, with some plans in place but little impact as yet. The school's intervention suite provides very effective support for vulnerable students both from within the school and from outside referrals from the local authority. This helps ensure they maintain their interest in education and continue their schooling. Students value this provision, one commenting, 'Things are sorted out for you. The people there are very nice'. Although attendance is broadly average, there is a rising trend as a result of the school's effective steps to reduce absence.

The school has started to analyse information on attainment and progress against academic targets set for students. This very useful work is currently undertaken termly and some parents would like to receive information more frequently. The school plans to address this during the coming year. Although marking shows some variability, students appreciate the quality of comments made by teachers, as it tells them what they have to do to improve their work. However, targets set in individual education plans are not sharp enough, and so students are not always sure what they need to do to meet their targets. The assessment of the few students who are at the early stages of learning English also lacks rigour.

Leadership and management

Grade: 2

The school benefits from good leadership and management at all levels. The headteacher works closely with his senior leadership team, developing their skills and knowledge as together they run the school very effectively. Senior leaders know their school well and are developing self-evaluation in all areas of school life. The school recognises the need to improve communication with parents. It is developing a wider range of media to communicate key messages about students' progress, and about school developments and successes.

Specialist school status has been developed to provide expanded opportunities for students, staff and the wider community. Set firmly in the context of a clear vision for development, excellent leadership has led to raised achievement in many areas of school life. Linking specialist funding to English exemplifies the innovative targeting of resources to support areas identified as needing improvement.

Subject leaders monitor the work of their teams closely. This leads to good teaching and learning and enables them to intervene where further support is needed. Strong links with senior line managers provide challenge and support for middle managers.

Ensuring more effective assessment of students' progress has been a major focus in recent years and this has had a clear impact in many areas. The school population has become more diverse in recent years and school policies and practice have adapted to ensure all needs are met. The school's firm commitment to equality and its inclusive approach have led to success for students from a range of backgrounds, including new arrivals from abroad.

Governors are highly committed to the school, acting as effective 'critical friends'. They hold the school to account, for example holding regular meetings where key issues and curriculum matters are debated. The school has made good progress since the last inspection. A particular success is in the area of curriculum development, which was judged unsatisfactory then and is now a strength. Woodcote High School has good capacity to improve further.

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Annex A

Inspection judgements

Key to judgements: grade 1 is outstanding, grade 2 good, grade 3 satisfactory, and grade 4 inadequate	School Overall
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Overall effectiveness

How effective, efficient and inclusive is the provision of education, integrated care and any extended services in meeting the needs of learners?	2
Effective steps have been taken to promote improvement since the last inspection	Yes
How well does the school work in partnership with others to promote learners' well-being?	2
The capacity to make any necessary improvements	2

Achievement and standards

How well do learners achieve?	2
The standards ¹ reached by learners	2
How well learners make progress, taking account of any significant variations between groups of learners	2
How well learners with learning difficulties and disabilities make progress	2

Personal development and well-being

How good is the overall personal development and well-being of the learners?	2
The extent of learners' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	2
The extent to which learners adopt healthy lifestyles	2
The extent to which learners adopt safe practices	2
How well learners enjoy their education	2
The attendance of learners	3
The behaviour of learners	2
The extent to which learners make a positive contribution to the community	2
How well learners develop workplace and other skills that will contribute to their future economic well-being	2

The quality of provision

How effective are teaching and learning in meeting the full range of the learners' needs?	2
How well do the curriculum and other activities meet the range of needs and interests of learners?	2
How well are learners cared for, guided and supported?	2

¹ Grade 1 - Exceptionally and consistently high; Grade 2 - Generally above average with none significantly below average; Grade 3 - Broadly average to below average; Grade 4 - Exceptionally low.

Annex A

Leadership and management

How effective are leadership and management in raising achievement and supporting all learners?	2
How effectively leaders and managers at all levels set clear direction leading to improvement and promote high quality of care and education	2
How effectively leaders and managers use challenging targets to raise standards	2
The effectiveness of the school's self-evaluation	2
How well equality of opportunity is promoted and discrimination tackled so that all learners achieve as well as they can	2
How effectively and efficiently resources, including staff, are deployed to achieve value for money	2
The extent to which governors and other supervisory boards discharge their responsibilities	2
Do procedures for safeguarding learners meet current government requirements?	Yes
Does this school require special measures?	No
Does this school require a notice to improve?	No

Text from letter to pupils explaining the findings of the inspection

12 February 2008

Dear Students

Inspection of Woodcote High School, Coulsdon, CR5 2EH

During our recent visit to your school, inspectors talked to many of you and listened to your views. We were very impressed by your confidence, honesty and maturity.

We agree that Woodcote High School is a good school. There is a strong focus on learning and achieving, and you make good progress as you move through the school. Your school has an increasingly rich mix of students from different ethnic, religious and language backgrounds, and this is helping you to become 'citizens of the world'. You respect differences and help others. Although some of your parents and carers feel that behaviour is not always as it should be, we were impressed by the way you behaved in class and around the school during our visit.

You talked to us about your teachers and how they help you. Their good teaching enables you to make progress and achieve good results. Your school is successfully bringing in new systems to involve you more in assessing your own progress and planning next steps in learning. The school's specialist sports status has provided you with many opportunities, which you enjoy to the full.

In order to help you do even better we have asked your school to improve your performance in English at GCSE and the overall grades reached by higher-attaining students. We have also asked the school to think about how to improve communications with your parents and carers, to make sure everyone understands and supports what the school is trying to achieve.

Thank you again for your hospitality, and we wish you every success in the future.

Yours sincerely,

Anne Feltham HMI

Lead Inspector